

An Open Letter from the National Counselling Society:

Addressed to **The Health and Social Care Select Committee:** Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt, Rosie Cooper, Dr Luke Evans, Barbara Keeley, Sarah Owen, Laura Trott, Paul Bristow, Dr James Davies, Neale Hanvey, Taiwo Owatemi, Dean Russell

Dear Committee members,

We are writing from the National Counselling Society (NCS) in response to the request for submissions regarding Children and Young People's Mental Health. NCS is one of the largest professional bodies for counsellors and psychotherapists in the UK, with our members working in a variety of settings including schools, colleges, and universities. Our members are bound by our Code of Ethics and those working with Children and Young People are asked to follow our CYP Competency Framework.

Children and Young People's Mental Health – the Current Picture:

In 2015 the [Future in Mind report](#) stated that *“The economic case for investment is strong. 75% of mental health problems in adult life (excluding dementia) start by the age of 18. Failure to support children and young people with mental health needs costs lives and money. Early intervention avoids young people falling into crisis and avoids expensive and longer-term interventions in adulthood. There is a compelling moral, social and economic case for change.”* This compelling case for change has continued to increase. [The NHS Digital Survey](#) (Oct 2020) found that in 2017 one in nine (10.8%) children aged 5 to 16 years identified as having a probable mental health disorder. In 2020 this had increased to one in 6 (16%).

Access to mental health services was inadequate before the pandemic, and sadly it appears to have deteriorated as the pandemic progresses. In a survey of school children by [Young Minds](#) (September 2020) almost a quarter of respondents (23%) said that there was less mental health support in their school than before the pandemic.

Counselling in Educational Settings:

Whilst we welcome the development of Mental Health Support Teams and Child Wellbeing Practitioners there is still no recognition of the **current workforce** of professional counsellors either currently working in schools or that are ready to do so.

The Government's plan to roll out NHS-led counselling in schools is to train and use Child Wellbeing Practitioners who follow a CBT based modality. It unfortunately ignores the highly skilled workforce of humanistic counsellors who are already trained and available to provide support to our children and young people.

[The Government response](#) to the Green Paper estimated that *“at full roll-out, the new Mental Health Support Teams could comprise up to 8,000 new staff. This is comparable in size to the entire current children and young people's mental health services workforce in the NHS, which is around 7,000 full time equivalent staff.”* There are approximately 90,000 trained and highly skilled counsellors and psychotherapists on [PSA Accredited Registers](#) across the UK.

[The Government response](#) stated, *“it is essential that the teams build on and increase the support already in place, for example high quality counselling services in schools and colleges.”*

[The Blue Print for Counselling in Schools](#) (2016) states that *“It also sets out the Government’s expectation that over time we would expect to see all schooling providing access to counselling services.”* Currently only 60% of secondary schools in England provide some level of counselling yet, *“Counselling is viewed as an accessible service, increasing the range of options available to children and young people who need to talk to a professional about issues in their lives.”* ([Blue Print 2016](#))

Lead author for the recent ETHOS study, Mick Cooper, Professor of Counselling Psychology at the University of Roehampton, said: *“Our analysis found that school-based humanistic counselling works and makes a difference to the well-being of pupils, albeit at a cost. However, it also highlighted the importance to continue to study the provision of mental health support in schools and how other services, such as CBT, can be employed to tackle these issues”.*

The [2017 Green Paper](#) ‘Transforming children and young people’s mental health provision’ set a goal to have the *‘right help in the right setting’* and we continue to campaign for humanistic counselling, alongside other mental health support, to be available in all schools, colleges, and universities. We support the whole-school approach that the Green Paper strived for and agree that it should incorporate a range of mental health interventions and support.

CAMHS:

The [2017 Green Paper](#) highlighted that *“Waits for treatment can vary considerably in different areas, with the shortest around four weeks and the longest in one provider up to 100 weeks from referral to treatment. Latest data shows that in 2016/17 the average wait for treatment in a children and young people’s mental health service was 12 weeks”.* The Green paper also found that of *“460,000 referrals to children and young people’s NHS-funded mental health services a year, with 200,000 going on to receive treatment in NHS-funded services”.* In the period 2019-20, this had increased to **538,564 referrals with 391,940 children receiving treatment**. School counsellors should be available in all schools to support children and young people prior to assessment by CAMHS, when their mental health issues are deemed below the threshold needed for treatment via CAMHS and for support after CAMHS interventions.

Recommendations:

- UK-wide collaboration between the education, health and voluntary sectors in the interest of child mental health and wellbeing.
- Inclusion of all counselling and psychotherapy Accredited Registers in the development of future plans.
- A statutory national in-school counselling service staffed only by professionally accredited counsellors on an Accredited Register supported by ring-fenced funding.
- Counselling to be made available in all primary care settings to allow easy access for children who are either not in school or do not feel comfortable in accessing a service at school.

There is a large workforce of highly skilled counsellors ready to expand the support they currently offer to our young people. The NCS is also about to launch an Accredited Register for counsellors who work specifically with Children and Young People, supported by our excellent competency framework for working with this age group.

Kind regards

Jyles Robillard-Day
Assistant CEO